Best Practices In
Service-Learning
In Defiance College's
Business Program

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Service Learning Defined

For the purpose of this paper, service learning will follow the definition given by the National Commission on Service-Learning in 2001. It defined service learning as integrating community service with academic study (Johnson, 2003). The difference between community service (volunteerism) and service learning is the strong linkage to the curriculum. When this linkage is measured as an educational outcome, the impact on academic outcomes is much more enduring (Billig, 2000).

Impact of Service Learning

Since the early 1980s, politicians, business leaders, and parents have expressed their concern over the diminishing quality of education in America. After cataloguing the deficiencies, they proposed various remedies. The remedy that gained greatest support at federal and local levels has involved drilling students to memorize facts and procedures so they can earn high marks on standardized achievement tests. One problem with this "solution" is that students are uninspired by pointless assignments and rote memorization. On a deeper level, it tends to ignore how the brain works best (Johnson, 2003).

Service learning seems to be the latest evolution in education as studies are being published that reflect the positive impact of linking service with academic achievement. Students participating in well-designed service learning program or activities have shown more classroom engagement, improvements in language arts, reading, English, mathematics, grade point averages, and other educational areas. Participants have also felt that they could make a civic or social difference and were committed to service later in life (Billig, 2000).

By contrast, service learning is a strategy that offers an effective pathway to academic success for all students, from kindergarten through university. It carefully identifies specific academic objectives in classes such as English, history, science, health, mathematics, and business, and it then invites students to achieve these objectives by actively participating in work that benefits others. Whether the students are "at risk" or well- adjusted, this approach draws forth their full promise (Johnson, 2003).

In 2001, the National Commission on Service-Learning chaired by former Sen. John Glenn released a report titled Learning in Deed: The Power of Service- Learning for American Schools. The report defines service learning as "a teaching and learning approach that integrates community service with academic study to enrich learning, teach civic responsibility, and strengthen communities." The American Association of Community Colleges calls it "the combination of community service and classroom instruction, with a focus on critical, reflective thinking as well as personal and civic responsibility" (Johnson, 2003).

Because of these positive outcomes, there is an increasingly number of colleges and universities implementing service-learning programs and a national ranking of service learning schools published each year by *U.S. News and World Report*. These rankings are starting to become a critical component of how students select their higher education institute of choice, as these programs are becoming a 'value added' element of

recruiting and retention for colleges and universities around the nation. As such, higher education is looking to schools that have already succeeded in creating, implementing, growing, and sustaining service-learning programs in sharing their stories of service-learning success. This is one such story.

Service-learning At Defiance College

Historically, Winter Term (Dec-Jan) was a time for experiential and experimental learning. In addition, some activities were created to help students perform service to both local and global communities. Through the years from 1971 until 1996, activities included creating social services resource handbooks for the local area providers to refer clients, finding resources for First Call For Help, Habitat for Humanity projects, Church World Service (during Russia's invasion of Afghanistan), various service activities for Back Bay Mission in Mississippi, various Native American projects in Arizona and South Dakota, tax services for the elderly, and special trips and projects in Kenya, China, and Jamaica (J. Weaner, personal communication, December 1, 2006; J. Bechtel, personal communication, October 23, 2006; R. Kohl, personal communication, February 1, 2007). Many of these activities continue today (Back Bay, tax services, and Jamaica, to name a few) and have been part of Defiance College's fabric for decades.

In the 1980s, the Winter Term evolved into the term where many students took General Education courses, and service activities started to be rescheduled throughout the year, yet continued to be connected to various 'practical' type classes in Education, Social Work, Business, and Religious Studies. These activities continued to allow students to see their service impact their community and with the added component of reflecting upon these actions, the beginnings of Service Learning started at Defiance College (J. Weaner, personal communication, December 1, 2006; J. Bechtel, personal communication, October 23, 2006).

In 1994, Dr. James Harris became Defiance College President. He found that at this stage of Defiance College's history, it was drifting along without a purpose, direction, or focus for the institute except survival. One day, as he was walking on campus, he happened to read the plaque from Sisson Hall, a men's dorm, which had burned down years earlier. The plaque dealt with teaching young men and getting them ready for service. The last two words of the plaque resonated with Harris the most. They were: "…worthy service." This became the inspiration for service learning at Defiance College (R. Stroede, personal communication, October 19, 2006). Dr. Harris knew he had to recreate Defiance College into a distinct and unique college. He saw the college's mission as service to God, humanity, and the earth (Punches, 1994). Harris phrased this into, "…an institution with an arrow-straight mission: to develop men and women intellectually, morally, physically and spiritually for leadership and worthy service in society" (Harris, 1994).

Dr. Harris was well aware of Defiance College's service history (going all the way back to the 1930s) and his service learning idea coincided with higher education becoming more aware of service and the potential impact upon education service learning held (Harris, 1998). Jim felt that he could 'pick it up a notch' and decided to present his

idea to the faculty (R. Stroede, personal communication, October 19, 2006; J. Bechtel, personal communication, October 23, 2006).

Dr. Harris held a faculty meeting in the fall of 1995 and presented his mission of service idea. After his presentation, he allowed the faculty to divide into three groups: go for it, maybe, and no way. Most of the faculty was not in agreement with his plan. Many thought that it would not work and would die quickly. After discussions and some heated yet respectful comments between Harris and the faculty, the decision to proceed was granted by the faculty and the program gained official status. A small committee began the work of organizing thoughts and ideas with the current service system (J. Bechtel, personal communication, October 23, 2006). The program was designated a priority in early 1995 and with the beginning of school in September 1995, it was official. The mission of Defiance College was service (Harris, 1995).

The new program model was fashioned in accordance with Figure 1. Freshmen would experience Service learning (large S, small L) with an emphasis on Service. The sophomore and junior years evolving into balanced Service Learning experiences as the program started to reach it's culminating year. The senior year would be centered on service Learning. The purposeful evolution of the program passed from more service to more learning as graduates gained experience and knowledge that would better equip them to make a difference in the world as they graduated and moved on with their professional and personal lives (R. Stroede, personal communication, October 19, 2006).

Figure 1.
Service Learning Model

Freshmen Sl	Juniors SL
Sophomores sl	Seniors sL

Defiance's new service-learning model also included three phases of 'learning' for each student, researching the community prior to being served, relevance between service to their own lives and the academic subjects they are studying, serious reflection to fully understand the impact they have had or could have in the future through their service activities (Harris, 1995).

SL In The Business Division

Service learning for freshmen in the business department begins with the General Education course Freshmen Seminar. This course incorporates a "Service Fair" that has over 35 non-profit agencies within Defiance County in attendance. Freshmen attend the fair to be connected to organizations of interest and sign up with multiple agencies to

ensure that they are assimilated quickly into Defiance College's culture of service. Students are required to have a minimum of 10 hours of service hours with their agency and write their reflections about their service experience via journals during the semester. We have found out that the ten-hour minimum rule becomes superfluous as students expose themselves to our version of service and grow to connect to their organizations and projects.

The business program built upon this foundation with service activities to local agencies and small business owners through a sophomore level marketing course and the senior year capstone course in strategic planning. Due to evolving program outcomes, the marketing service activity was slowly replaced with individual service activities on a case-by-case basis for sophomores and juniors.

<div align="center">Best Practices</div>

Over the years, the department has identified a list of best practices (Table 1) that enable students to experience and participate in the most experiential outcome to the program.

Table 1.
Defiance College Business Department Best Practices

Practice	Definition
Service-Learning Outcomes Embedded In The Curriculum	College-wide support through strategic planning and implementation
Measurable Outcomes	Project outcomes are measurable with outcome matrices in place
Town and Gown Relationship	Business faculty involved in community – oriented business activities
Course Development Consistency	Service-Learning courses are consistent in course development and implementation across the business faculty
Flexible Projects	Allow projects that interest the students and are vital to the organizations involved
Systematic Project Monitoring	Iterative process to monitor projects
Feedback Process	Student, organizational, and faculty feedback loops

<div align="center">Assigning A Service-Learning Project</div>

The senior capstone course, BA490 Policy, has become the cornerstone course for service activities within the division. The course usually runs two sections, one for traditional and one for non-traditional students. The course centers on strategic planning theory with its application being a service project with local profit and/or non-profit organizations. As with any capstone course, all business areas and subjects are reviewed, discussed, and expanded upon. Students are required to incorporate as many of these topics as possible in their project. Opportunities for experiential experiences are cultivated through three pathways, students, local business leaders, and local non-profit agencies. Students provide opportunities through their connections via internships and

co-ops. They may also sense an opportunity for a project and through coordination efforts between them, the organization, and faculty, a project is developed.

The business division enjoys close-knit relationships with the local business owners, Defiance Chamber of Commerce, the Defiance County Economic Development Office, and the Defiance County United Way. Through continuous word-of-mouth and "advertising" within these organizations, owners and directors facing various challenges within their organizations propose projects to business faculty members for consideration. The faculty members are the prime contacts for these proposals to ensure the validity of the project and its appropriateness for the class and business program. It is also the avenue for individual sophomore and junior service projects.

Appropriate proposals by business owners or non-profit directors are given to the faculty member and presented to the class for further research and deliberation. Students are directed to meet with corporate and organizational leaders to discern the nature of the project and to agree on the outcome objectives. The projects can encompass myriad topics such as strategic plans, marketing plans, business plans, reorganizing, operational plans, financial plans, and other issues. The class is broken into teams of four or less students due to the heavy workload of the experiential aspect of the capstone project.

Upon agreement between the team and the external organization, the faculty member will make a final determination for the proposal to ensure the goals and objectives of the project are appropriate for the course and attainable by the students involved. If a faculty member believes that a group is over- or under-matched, he or she will redesign the project appropriately. Challenging and stretching our students is a critical element of the educational and experiential process.

Bush-Bacelis (1998) recommends a six-step process that students should follow in completing a service-learning project:

1. Written proposal
2. Oral proposal
3. Written progress report
4. Oral progress report
5. Final written report
6. Final oral report

While different modes of project operation and reporting can be used, one faculty member in the business program has reduced this process to the following:

1. Written proposal (outline of the project, goals, and objectives)
2. Weekly oral status report ("How is it going?")
3. Scheduled iterations of the final written report (in-progress paper submissions)
4. Final oral presentation (classroom/organizational presentation)

The primary monitoring activity is step three. The team designates the writer of the project who then submits the developing final written report to the instructor. The instructor becomes the team's report editor and project monitor ensuring the team stays on tract and focus as it progresses to project completion. Timely adjustments, redirection, amplification, and outcome strengthening are easily accomplished. Nothing is more frustrating to students and faculty members than a project that has gone astray and discovered too late to make course corrections. This iterative process ensures that projects are as successful as possible.

Table 3 is a *small* list of projects students completed covering such issues as strategic, marketing, financial, operational, and business plans in both the profit and nonprofit world.

Table 3.
Project and Organizations Served

Organization	Service Project
Defiance County United Way	Strategic Planning and website redesign
Henry County Fair Grounds	Strategic Plan for fair ground utilization and operations
The Villages of Holgate, Hamler, and Fayette	Downtown redevelopment and financial development planning
The Anderson Foundation	Restructuring of charitable giving procedures
Williams County Economic Development	County golf course feasibility plan
Cabin Fever Coffee Shop	Business, marketing, and expansion planning
RE/Max Realty	Marketing and website planning
All Occasions Plus	Grand opening marketing plan
Cartridge City	Marketing plan
Toledo Child Adoption Agency	Initial business plan
Volunteer Connection	Strategic realignment; Local Business Survey
Lutheran Social Services	Initial business plan
Defiance County Food Pantry	Consolidation feasibility plan
Midwest Community Financial Credit Union	Marketing plan
Defiance College	Alumni survey: Assessing service levels of and impact upon alumni;

Summary
Service learning became an integral part of the overall mission of Defiance College, yet was part of the business program many years prior to its strategic implementation. By making the proper and enduring connections to the business community-at-large, Defiance College is able to sustain vital experiential events that assist its college students in applying their craft in a service environment.

One outcome of this program is a more vibrant business and non-profit community that better serves Defiance County. Community businesses and organizations have been able to serve better their customers and clients, which allows them to sustain their competitive advantage.

Another outcome is the student's ability to put into practical use their teachings and gain valuable experience in business operations prior to graduation. Being able to implement business theory into the marketplace is the best possible teacher in any business education program.

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